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Op Ed -- Another Name for the Out-of-Print Book Market

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Op Ed — Another Name for the Out-of-Print Book Market

by **Bob Holley** (Professor, Library & Information Science Program, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI 48202; Phone: 313-577-4021; Fax: 313-577-7563) <aa3805@wayne.edu>

I have been concerned for a long time that the term “out-of-print book market” is a misnomer and gives an inaccurate idea of the range of materials available for purchase. As part of the preparations for the special issue of *Against the Grain* on this topic, I posted the following email to the Acqnet-I discussion list on August 7, 2009.

As part of the special issue of *Against the Grain* on the out-of-print book market, I’m sponsoring a contest to see if anyone can come up with a better name to describe its much broader scope.

Here is the current term and some possibilities along with the objections:

Out-of-print — many of the items are still in print

Used — many of the items are new

Secondary — some publishers sell their items directly

If you have any thoughts on the matter or any new suggestions, would you send them to me off-list at <aa3805@wayne.edu>?

I’ll publish any or all of the comments that I receive. If I edit your response, you’ll have a chance to review the final version.

Thanks. **Bob**

I received a total of fifteen responses with twenty-one suggested terms. Two of the responses were comments or questions, and several of the suggested terms were linguistic duplicates of the same concept. I was surprised at the number of responses both from old friends and from people that I didn’t know. The respondents also proposed terms that they admitted that they didn’t like but that they had heard other people using. More than half (nine) suggested two or three possibilities.

The winner by a large margin was “hard-to-find” with four recommendations (**Rogelio H. Hinojosa**, Texas A&M International University; **Susan Julian**, University of Tulsa; **William P. Kane**, Alibris for Libraries; and **Lynn A. Lonergan**, Fairchild Research Information Center, Maxwell AFB) with its variant “harder-to-find” as an alternate (**Julian**). **Lonergan**, explains that she has “a folder labeled ‘Hard-to-find’ for these sites. It indicates to me these are sources for titles not usually available from our jobber, **Amazon**, **Barnes & Noble**, and so forth.” **Bill Kane** comments that “so called hard-to-find books are really not hard-to-find anymore, but the term conveys a certain past tense.” I find implicit in this term the sense that librarians would use this market when they couldn’t find the item from their preferred source. The term may not apply as well for those libraries that check the out-of-print market first to see if they can buy items more cheaply.

Three terms emphasize that the market sells materials from sources other than the original publisher — “after-

market” (**John Riley**, **Gabriel Books**), “resale market” (**Bob Nardini**, **Coutts Information Services**), and secondhand (**Kane**). **Nardini** states that “it’s the second sale (at least) for these titles new and used.” **Riley** says that “aftermarket” comes from the auto parts industry. I personally like these two terms because they accurately describe almost all items that are sold in this market. While another suggestion from **Kane**, “secondhand,” is also technically correct, it has the connotation of used and worn, an inaccurate description for the many brand new books that are being resold. It wasn’t his first choice. The small contradiction here is that I know of one publisher, **Idea Group**, that sells at least some of its titles directly on **Half.com** — “Brand New! Straight from Publisher!” to quote the description for *Managing Data Mining Technologies in Organizations*. I’ll conclude this category with one other suggestion from **Riley**, “previously loved,” “which you hear and wretch.” I certainly concur that this term suggests an inauthentic marketing ploy.

Brigida Campos, Pasadena Public Library, suggests two variations of a publishing term — “backlist books” and “backlist titles” with the problem that many front list titles are also available. With “Internet book market” and “Internet book marketplace,” **Dennis K. Lambert**, Villanova University, emphasizes the online aspects of the market.

I can see some reasons for this choice now that two major online booksellers, **Amazon.com** and **Barnes & Noble**, sell both new and used books from the same site. The term does not, however, make the distinction between these books and the ones sold directly from the publishers over the Internet.

In another suggestion, **Hinojosa** emphasizes the way the books are sold with “diversified channels” and “unconventional channels.” In a similar fashion, **Rick C. Mason**, Capital University, proposes “non-mainstream.” “Diversified channels” has some merit since the term hints at the number of individual booksellers on the Internet but may not be specific enough. The other two assume the perspective that the normal channel is buying books new from publishers or the major vendors such as **Amazon** and **Barnes & Noble** — an assumption that may not be true for many book purchasers.

I have lumped together four suggestions that imply that the books are somehow in danger or have been saved from loss by their becoming available in this market. Two of the suggested terms — “books in limbo” (**Arlene Moore Sievers-Hill**, Case Western Reserve University) and “resurrected” (**Maureen Quinn**, **Coutts Information Services**) have religious connotations. The other two — “books-in-peril market” (**John Mauch**, Saginaw Valley State University) and “endangered book market” (**Mauch**) — suggest that the market is saving these books from oblivion, a true statement for some titles but not for those with wide availability.

Thomas W. Leonhardt, St. Edwards University, provides the last three terms. Two suggestions — “book bazaar” and “book flea market” — suggest used items that are available potentially at a lower price. His last proposal is “books for sale,” a generic term that could be applied to all books sales.

I suspect that the term out-of-print book market will remain the preferred alternative because most people understand what it means even if the term is technically inaccurate. As such, it will join other such English terms as “monogamy,” which says nothing about

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Associate University Librarian, Yale

by **Dennis Brunning** (E Humanities Development Librarian, Arizona State University) <dennis.brunning@gmail.com>

Column Editor's Note: *Ann Shumelda Okerson has been Associate University Librarian at Yale since 1996. Ann also has 15 years of academic library and library management experience, including the commercial sector and the Association of Research Libraries. She has made major contributions to the understanding of serials pricing, electronic journals, and consortial pricing. Currently she leads international projects to build a Middle Eastern digital library. I interviewed Ann recently. — DB*

ATG: Liblicense and Liblicense-I — ten years old and going strong with over 3,000 followers. Does this surprise you? What have been the most memorable threads? Any teachable moments?

Ann Okerson: *Liblicense-I* started when the world of library licensing, in particular for Web-based journals, was young. I remember conversations with **Academic Press** in 1995 at their booth at the **Frankfurt Book Fair**; these led to libraries' first important e-journal deals. **AP's** "IDEAL" offer to consortia — and similar early forays into the electronic world — led in January 1997 to the start of the list, as a place for sharing expertise and current news and opinions. Around that time, the **LIBLICENSE** Website was launched, as an educational resource with growing numbers of links, model license information, and licensing software — it provides also an interface to the list archives. So, we're approaching 13 years, with 14,400 messages under our collective belts. The number of signed up readers is now over 3,400 and still growing gradually. We do hardly any marketing, and we're still mail-list-

based, in order to reach easily subscribers on all continents, including Antarctica. A number of countries still have connectivity and bandwidth issues, so plain text is most workable for them. (The Website's still got a little 90s flavor about it, because I never found anybody to replace the student who set it up in the first place — he went off to make a lot of money as one of **Amazon's** first 200 employees!)

Of course I'm surprised and pleased that the list has remained a valuable and lively place for talking about important issues, as well as an educational forum that library school professors assign to their students! A few people have even told me that their postings on the list have enhanced their careers. What started out as a discussion closely focused on licensing has moved into broader topics related to e-publishing, scholarly communication, events, usage measurement, and more. The fundamentals remain focused on what it takes to bring the best scholarly and scientific resources to our users, but we've realized that doing that is more than just a question of licensing techniques and principles. When the list stops serving a useful purpose, it will go away.

Memorable threads? Hard to say, because so many ideas have passed through the list. At one point, I was asked to create a "*Best of Liblicense-I*" for a library organization's publications program, and the number of interesting threads proved just too many to make the project realistic. After trying for some months, I gave up.

Teachable moments for me have been less about content and more about moderating, editing, and how wedded people are to their postings, even though the postings are not research articles. People don't like even a word changed — they feel it alters their intentions. There are repeat posters who tire or bore readers — that can be a delicate issue. I try to err on the side of including nearly everything, and thus some readers will be offended. But, I try to not repeat postings that are well covered on several other lists, and that causes complaints at times. Mostly, I'm surprised at how many list readers have written to me over the years, when something about the content or style of a message has irritated them, and am deeply grateful for the interest — and the opportunity to engage in an offline conversation about how to be a better moderator. Still, it seems that mostly we've struck a balance that keeps the list valuable. There have been a few legal issues where we've benefited from advice of counsel when asked to redact postings out of the archive for one reason or another. Those may have been the most teachable of all!

ATG: Open Access gained attention, in part, to Stevan Harnad's subversive proposal published in your 1995 book (co-edited with James O'Donnell) *Scholarly Journals at the Crossroads: a Subversive Proposal for Elec-*

tronic Journal Publishing. Where is open access publishing now after fifteen years of active debate? Still a subversive proposal?

AO: Open access is a fascinating and important idea and topic that has a way of polarizing people instead of unifying them. You can see already in that 1995 book a near-religious undercurrent of enthusiasm. It's sobering to see that in the 14 years since that book, the world of expensive licensed information has burgeoned beyond imagination; at the same time it's encouraging to see that the passion many of us share for making information as broadly available as possible remains strong; and, finally, it's disheartening a bit to see, over and over, that people who are very close to each other on questions of principle can sometimes turn disagreements about implementation into fierce mud-slinging. On the one hand, open access has come into common parlance as a business model (i.e., about finding ways to cover costs up front so that publications are free to all at point of reading) and, on the other, it is an idealistic goal, part of the Internet notion that all publications can and should be free to all readers at all times. My biggest worry is that focusing on this issue in debate mode makes it harder to get attention and enthusiasm to other elements in the chain of things that have to happen and keep happening in order for the broadest possible access to be achieved.

ATG: It certainly was the summer of the eBook with new consumer market devices coming on board and mass media interest in e reading. Do you Kindle? Will academic libraries ever Kindle?

AO: Indeed the whole eBook "thing" is finally taking off. Suddenly, it's a horserace among devices and formats and platforms and vendors and business models, and right now the clouds of dust on the back straightaway are obscuring my vision, at least. It's clear that eBooks will be a format of choice for many readers in many settings and that **everything** will soon be published with some kind of digital representation as one of the options. I knew the eBooks moment had arrived when in the September 2009 issue of *Conde Nast Traveler* there was a review of the **Kindle** and **Sony** readers. My first thought was, "WHY is this here?" My second was, "of course, travelers READ," and using a device like this saves us carrying tons of tree matter in our luggage and running out of books part way through a trip in a region where one can't just have **Amazon** free-ship the book you want, ASAP. When I travel and walk up and down the aisles on the Acela or airplane boarding lounges, I see now a mix of eBook readers and DVD players.

And there are announcements galore — **Sony's** partnership with **Google** for 500K public domain books for free; **Amazon** exploring this space to provide free as well as priced books.

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the number of sexual partners but refers to the number of spouses, and "agnostic," which refers to whether the existence of God can be proved rationally so that a believing Christian can be an agnostic.

To end with a humorous anecdote, I tell my students about the out-of-print book market that, for many of them, conjures up the image of old, musty, expensive books. One of them even wrote during the weekly assignment that her library didn't use the out-of-print book market for older materials. "It bought them from **Alibris**."

I'd like to hear from you at <aa3805@wayne.edu> if you have further thoughts on a better name for the out-of-print book market that my wonderful panel of experts somehow missed. 🐼